

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 16, 2018

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member Bishop:

As Members of Congress with an interest ensuring clean water and productive agriculture in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, we thank the Subcommittee for its legacy of leadership with respect to agricultural conservation. Chesapeake Bay states are heavily invested in implementing a Blueprint designed to restore the Bay and the rivers and streams that feed it. Productive farms that keep valuable nutrients on the land and out of the water are key. Federal partnership to support this effort is critical to success. To maintain the trust and collaboration of state partners built over decades, we have identified essential programs in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in fiscal year 2019. We urge the Subcommittee to protect these valuable programs from changes in mandatory spending.

States in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed have been working together to restore this national treasure since 1983, when Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania signed the first Chesapeake Bay Agreement -- a voluntary, regional partnership to achieve the states' vision of an environmentally and economically sustainable Chesapeake Bay Watershed. As a testament to the value of this federal-state partnership, all watershed states signed the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. Under this Agreement, states and federal agencies have voluntarily committed to work together to restore water quality in the Bay by 2025.

As you know, through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA works with farmers to help them plan and install voluntary practices on their farms that protect water quality and support farm productivity. In the Bay Agreement, the Agency committed to work with producers in the Bay watershed to install voluntary conservation practices on 4 million acres of agricultural working lands by 2025. To maintain the trust and collaboration with Bay states and producers built over decades, we must resist changes to mandatory funding levels for these programs.

**NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

Through the EQIP program, USDA shares the costs for installing water pollution-reducing practices on farms, a key element of all state Blueprints. On average, 40% of bay watershed farmers who want to install these practices are turned away by NRCS because cost-share funding is exhausted.

**NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program**

The Conservation Stewardship Program helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns like those in the Blueprint.

**NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

The RCPP is a program that funds conservation-focused partnerships. Within this program, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed has been designated as a Critical Conservation Area (CCA) and is eligible to receive a portion of CCA funding for projects that help reduce nutrient and sediment runoff that impacts the Chesapeake Bay and the local rivers and streams that feed it.

**USFSA Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program**

Through this program, the federal government partners with Bay states and land owners to support installation of a key practice in states' watershed implementation plans: riparian buffers. These buffers are one of the most cost-efficient and effective methods for reducing pollution to and improving the health of local rivers and streams and the bay.

Thanks to a strong federal-state partnership, Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts are showing great progress. But we need to maintain this partnership in order to ensure that both agricultural lands and the Chesapeake Bay are vital and economically productive. We thank you for supporting this essential partnership with Bay states and producers in an extraordinary effort that will benefit current and future generations.

Sincerely,

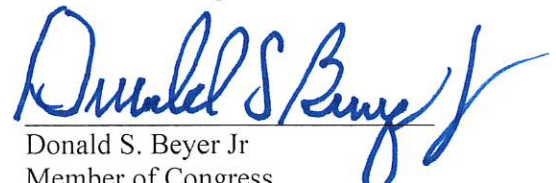
  
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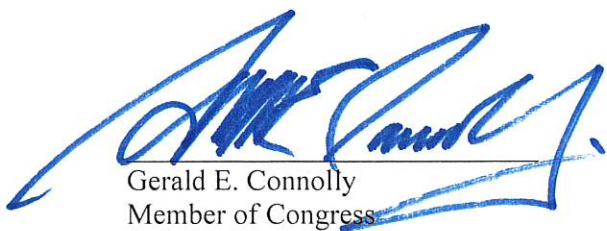
  
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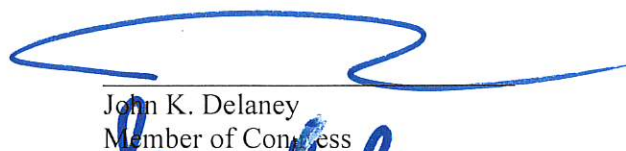
  
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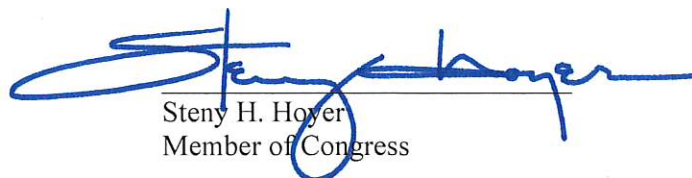
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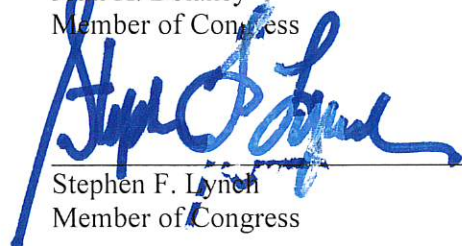
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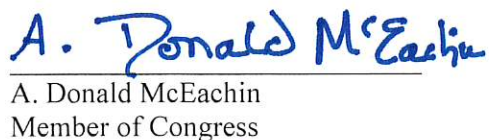
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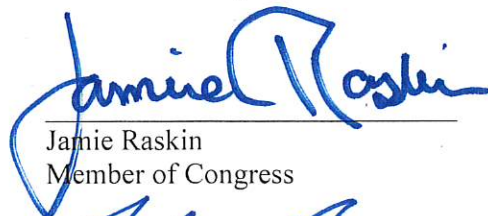
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